



Summer 2007

Volume 10 Issue 2

Out and About with Appleby Archaeology

The Society's first Summer Event saw a good turnout when members visited Brackenber Moor on the evening of 22nd May. Martin Railton took charge as he used to live on the edge of the Moor and knows every inch of it.

Among the features he showed us were a series of prehistoric barrows, a Roman signal station and much evidence of more recent track and field systems. Everybody agreed that the area has huge potential as a base for the Society's aim to develop its practical skills.

Another feature of the Moor is a



Members mount a prehistoric barrow on Brackenber Moor as they search for Martin Railton's missing dog

cluster of caves. These have been created purely by the swirling action of the wind in an exposure of Lazonby sandstone. The rock is criss-crossed by veins of silica and the surface has been scalloped into perfect works of art. One of the caves in particular is surprisingly

long and completely dry. Though the caves would have provided perfect shelter for early man, there has been no investigation of this site as far as we know.



A wind-eroded cave on Brackenber Moor—a home for early man?

However, the star attraction, tucked away on the edge of the Moor, is the "Druidical Judgement seat". This takes the form of a spur of flat ground overlooking a small beck. An area of about a couple of acres has been enclosed by a defensive ditch. It has the feel of an Iron Age hill-fort. Not quite Cadbury Hill perhaps, but very interesting and quite dramatic, for all that. Off to the right on Ketland, there are rumours of a similar ditched enclosure.

Martin has sent off an application to English Heritage requesting permission for the Society to carry out a geophysical survey here. Martin plans to carry out the work during the week beginning 16th July and is looking for volunteers to participate in both this

and a landscape survey of the surrounding area. Full training will be given. Please contact Martin for details. His email address and telephone number are:

Martin@railton2006.wanadoo.co.uk

and

01434 382045 (during office hours)

This is a great opportunity to try out some modern equipment and do some real archaeological research. The area is easily accessible by car and is a good spot for a picnic too!

Call for Articles

As always, the editor is looking for newsletter articles. If you find you'd like to send me a few notes and a picture or two, the editorial email address is:

mjoycemilburn@gmail.com

Martin Joyce

North Pennines Archaeology

Who are we?

North Pennines Archaeology Ltd. (NPA) is the largest commercial archaeology unit in Cumbria and is based at the Nenthead Mines

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The Slaughter of the British

The Slaughter of the British; Excavations at Heronbridge was the intriguing title of the last talk of the season to the Appleby Archaeology Group. Dr David Mason, the county archaeologist for County Durham spoke about the excavations at Heronbridge near Chester. This had brought to light strong evidence of the Battle of Chester circa 616AD. A battle which influenced the history of the British in the North West.

Heronbridge stands on the west bank of the River Dee two kilometres south of Chester city centre alongside what in Roman times was Watling Street. It is free of modern settlement and the small area that has been explored has been found to be rich in archaeological material from the time of Romans to the English Civil War. Excavations following the Second World War identified an extensive civil Roman settlement along Watling Street. This ribbon development had a planned layout and there was evidence of industrial working.

Before this in 1929 remains of Roman buildings had been discovered and over the next year or two excavations took place. Attention was focused on the Roman remains but there was a surprise when a number of later burials were discovered. The bodies, some interred singly and some in a mass grave, had been buried in the ruins of the Roman buildings. Subsequent analysis showed that the remains were of men aged be-

tween 20 and 40 years who had been killed in a battle or a massacre. There were no grave goods and no dates could be placed on the burial at the time they were found.

Seventy years later the mystery of the burials remained but the bodies had vanished possibly because they had been re-interred or destroyed by bombing during the war. In 2001 a new Heronbridge Project was set up to revisit the site of 1930's excavations and to investigate the most obvious feature of the site, an earthwork which encloses a crescent-shaped area of fourteen acres, lying between the Roman road and the river.

Over the next four summers groups of volunteers led by Dr Mason dug a number of trenches to examine the earthwork. These excavations revealed remains of Roman buildings below the mound and a deep ditch and defensive rampart which surrounded part of the mound but had never extended along the riverside edge. The rampart had been supported by stones robbed from the ruins of the Roman buildings and tombstones taken from the cemeteries along Watling Street. There was no evidence of modification or repair to the defences or of buildings within it which suggested that it had only been in use for a short time. Flax seeds found in the ditch were carbon dated to a range of dates from the late seventh century to the early ninth. The soil con-

taining the seeds, now lying in the ditch, appeared to have post dated the cutting of the ditch by a considerable period of time. It is now thought likely that the ditch and ramparts were constructed before the mid eighth century. Documentary evidence, for example from Bede, suggests that the only event that would have necessitated such a defence was the Battle of Chester.

An outcrop of rocks which can be seen on the west bank of the river, when the water is low, led to the discovery of an ancient riverbed, an inlet quay with a track way leading from it.

Two graves, robbed in antiquity were found on the rocky promontory. Several elaborately carved stone sculptures were removed from the silt and from these the archaeologists came to the conclusion that there had been an impressive monument on the out-



The Roman jetty, Heronbridge

crop marking the burial of two adults and a child.

Excavations near the 1930's site located more burials when part of a mass grave pit was exposed and was clear that this had been a bat-

the cemetery. The bodies had been laid side by side, in rows which partially overlapped, and most had sustained head injuries. Two skeletons were removed for analysis and radiocarbon dating. Both belonged to well built men, the elder aged about 40 and the younger about 20. Both had sustained fatal head injuries and other sword inflicted wounds which suggested that they had been in the thick of the fighting. Signs of previous injuries made it likely that they were experienced soldiers. Radio-carbon dating indicated that the men in the mass grave were the casualties of the Battle of Chester, and because the bodies were in a fully articulated state, it is likely that they had been buried near the site of the battle. At this time Britain was made up of small kingdoms competing for power. It is known that King Aethelfrith of Northumbria had swept south and west from his capital in Bamburgh to confront the Britons and that he had met a hastily gathered force of West Britons near Chester. There had been a great slaughter in the battle that took place and the Britons were defeated.

The great care with which the bodies had been placed in the grave



Battle cemetery: part of a mass grave

suggested that they belonged to the victorious army of Aethelfrith rather than the defeated forces. Recent radio-isotope analysis of the enamel of the teeth of the skeletons has confirmed that those buried were indeed warriors from Northumbria. There is also a strong possibility that the earthwork defence was constructed by the Northumbrian forces following Aethelfrith's victory. However it was short lived as he was later defeated near 6Bawtry by a combination of the main British force from the west and of King Raedwald's army from East Anglia.

Dr Mason concluded by saying that the dating of both the battle cemetery and the earthwork to the seventh century have greatly elevated the importance and status of the Heronbridge complex. If it is officially recognised, Heronbridge could qualify as the earliest identified battle site in England.

Phyllis Rouston 25/4/07

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Heritage Centre, Alston. We are part of the North Pennines Heritage Trust, which is a registered charity and a social enterprise; all the profits from the archaeology company support the aims of the trust, and help to restore and conserve the mining heritage of the North Pennines. We are one of the few organisations offering employment to archaeologists in the area.

NPA undertakes a wide range of



Excavating a body

commercial archaeology projects throughout Cumbria, Northumberland and the North East, as well as running a field school for students at Nenthead Mines. We presently have a dozen full-time staff, who routinely undertake archaeological excavations, surveys and building recording projects. We have also recently introduced a geophysical survey service, and are offering this to groups and organisations in Cumbria. We have an environmental archaeology facility, for assessing the environmental potential of soil samples, and an archaeology consultancy service.

Archaeology Projects:

Recent projects in Cumbria have included the excavation of an 18th century tannery at K-Village in Kendal, where a series of tanning pits were revealed. These were directly related to the early history of K-Shoes. Strangely we also found a number of human toes which are a bit of an enigma!

Building recording projects have included the survey of a bastle (fortified farmhouse) at Allendale in Northumberland prior to conversion, and a detailed survey of Blencow Hall near Penrith. This is an impressive fortified medieval manor house with twin ruined towers. Detailed stone-by-stone recording was undertaken to produce scaled elevation drawings. We also produced a geophysical survey of the grounds which showed possible earlier buildings, and a network of stone culverts. We also undertake a large number of smaller barn and farm surveys, in order to assess their archaeological potential prior to redevelopment.

We are currently undertaking an archaeological evaluation of Carlisle Airport for WA Developments. This includes the largest geophysical survey ever made in Cumbria, and the excavation of hundreds of trial trenches! The airport is close to Hadrian's Wall and the Stanegate, and a Roman camp lies under the present runway. The geophysics has shown possible prehistoric features, and a number of finds of Neolithic and Bronze Age date have been found nearby, so we anticipate some

interesting archaeology.

This summer we are running a 'rescue' excavation at Scoredale Lead Mines, near Hilton for English Heritage. Stuart Ainsworth and his team have been surveying the mine remains over the last few weekends



(when the army are not firing!), and

Investigating a prehistoric pit

our excavation will help to disentangle the development and history of the mines. These have been damaged in recent years by the flooding of Scoredale Beck. A Bronze Age settlement has also been surveyed.

We are also running numerous smaller evaluations, watching briefs and surveys around the county. Many of these do not get published, and so members of Appleby Archaeology Group may not be aware of the archaeological work we do. All projects have a report deposited in the Cumbria Historic Environment Record, at the Cumbria County Council offices in Kendal, where viewing is available on request. Our larger projects will be published in the Transactions of the CWAAS. In the mean time members may wish to check our website (www.nparchaeology.co.uk), or watch this space for further updates...

Martin Railton

Summer Events

Threlkeld Mining Museum and Iron Age Village Saturday 23rd June 2007

An opportunity to view "Europe's largest collection of vintage quarrying machinery" and to visit the superbly-preserved Iron Age settlement mentioned by Andrew Hoane last year. Meet at 2.00pm outside the museum (NY 325 247) :
Approximate cost £5

Whitley Castle Tuesday 17th July

A 2 hour walk taking in the impressive Roman fort, Bastle houses and surrounding local landscape under the guidance of Alistair Robertson. Meet outside the Village Bakery in Melmerby at 6.30 to car share. If you plan to travel independently please note that the tour will commence at around 7pm and that parking opportunities are limited.



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